

Valedictory Address for Commencement
May 17, 1998

Good morning. On behalf of the class of 1998 I would like to welcome Bishop Grahman, Monsignor Joseph, the Board of Trustees, distinguished guests, faculty, staff, friends and of course, our families, to this commencement.

Four years ago, in our efforts to gain acceptance into this institution of higher learning, we were all asked to write an essay. We were given a quote by Descartes- "The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries."

Then we were asked to depict a conversation between two "fine men" of our choosing. Who would you choose today and what would they say? Four years ago I chose Thomas More from Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons* and Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Although I must admit I no longer remember what their conversation entailed, I would use them both again if I rewrote the essay today.

They represent the dialogue between faith and reason that each student that enters the doors of the University of Dallas has each day with those "fine men of past centuries."

Thomas More, saint and scholar, represents the faith and Christian intellectual tradition that have helped shape the intellectual life of this University. Atticus Finch, a voracious reader who possessed knowledge of a myriad of subjects, represents the other pillar of UD- the liberal arts tradition. Both men were profiles in moral courage, men of strong character. Both were also attentive fathers that gave special care to the education of their children. As we depart from UD and begin the next phase of our lives, we have much to learn from them ~~both~~.

We are all about to walk across this stage and complete our four year odyssey at UD. As we leave, we have much to be proud of and many people to thank. We should thank our families first and foremost. Sometime in our childhood there was an experience or an encounter that began this intellectual curiosity that brought us to the University of Dallas. It might have been a visit to church, or a trip to the children's library or the museum. We came here to answer the big questions- "What is truth? What is beauty?" Or perhaps, if we have siblings, "What is justice?" In either case, our experiences at home helped bring us here and keep us here. Our parents watched us agonize over school related decisions- should I go to Rome in the spring or the fall? Is this the right major? Can I handle ~~both~~ organic chemistry and physiology this semester? Our families have supported us in our decisions and during our lack of decision. For this we thank them. They observed our spiritual, intellectual and emotional growth firsthand, and also endured all our growing pains. During this age of the much heralded "breakdown of the family" we must remember the importance of our own family and thank them for teaching us love of God and love of learning, the tools that enable us to make the most of our education.

On behalf of the class of 1998, I also want to say thank you to the faculty of UD. Without your leadership, our dialogue with the great texts of the liberal arts tradition would have been fruitless. Well, perhaps not fruitless, but certainly less fruitful. One cannot hand seventeen and eighteen year-olds Homer, Dante, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Tocqueville, the Curies, Mendel, and Einstein and expect brilliance. The study and discussion of all these texts and ideas with the UD faculty during our stay here has taught us how to think. This gift of thought is one of the greatest things a university can bestow

*Gift of
Michael*

upon her students. We have learned to think about our faith- about our relationship with God; about right and wrong and how to say, “this is right” and “this is wrong;” about our place in the world; about our relationships with others; and of course, about our studies and their relation to the world.

We are fortunate to have been able to benefit from the University of Dallas’ tradition of excellence. UD is a unique institution. We have a mission in this world and we take it seriously. For the last four years we have been preparing ourselves to take on the “problematic and changing world” in which we live, not with job training, but with an education. What are our tools? We have some of the best. We have received an education that has taught us that there is Truth, and that, along with moral virtue, it is the proper and primary end of human knowledge. Our world may be problematic and changing, but we are fortunate enough to have sight of truths that are transcendent and unchanging. What truths are these? The truths of the Catholic faith that have shaped the intellectual life of this university, and the truths about human nature, that men are “spiritual and physical, rational and free.” Now is the time for us to take what we have learned out into the world and use it in our dealings with others. The truths of The Faith can never be separated from our ordinary life, and must be the basis of all our actions. We must also recognize our place in this world and our responsibility to others. We are part of something greater than ourselves, a complex community known as the body of Christ. Each human being plays an essential role in this authentic community, and demands our respect. This recognition of the dignity of each human person places a great responsibility on all Christians. We must treat our friends, acquaintances, and enemies

like other Christs. We encounter these “other Christs” in every aspect of our life. They are everywhere!

We are all about to enter a world of work, either further work as a student, or work as a professional of some sort, and through our work we will be serving others. We must remember this element of service in everything we do. Our work, no matter what we do, reflects our attitudes and sentiments, and we cannot underestimate its importance. Our approach to work is also often the first impression we give other people. To do it poorly, or with little care, shows a lack of concern for others and ourselves.

Our work in the world comes at a critical time. We stand on the verge of the third millenium amidst a cultural chaos like no other. There has been a loss of concern for the human person, the family, and any semblance of a serious attention to moral virtue. Humility, diligence, chastity, and temperance have been replaced by pride, sloth, lust, and gluttony. What can we UD graduates do about all this? First of all, remember the moral courage of men like Thomas More and Atticus Finch and the words of the Holy Father, John Paul II in his message to youth: “Be not afraid.” Then, pursue a career, have a family; get involved in life and in the lives of those around you, and live. Live well in testament to your beliefs and education. Set a good example by lending extra help before someone has to ask for it. Maintain a charitable attitude toward all your fellow workers, and you will earn their respect. All of this does not require great fanfare, but an ordinary, everyday commitment to the most ordinary and extraordinary things. Through our everyday activity we can work to reverse the current trends of our culture. As Christians, we are called to be in the world and to set the world on fire.

The world needs more Thomas Mores and Atticus Finches. No, we probably won't be called to martyrdom or to stand up to an entire town, but we will be called to be faithful in the little things. UD students need to be out in the world putting their faith and education into action in their jobs, with their friends, and in their families. The UD education, a combination of the great texts of the Western Tradition and the truths of the Catholic faith, has aided our personal dialogue between faith and reason. We can choose not to utilize what we have been given, but to do so would deny much of the richness and vitality of our future experiences in the world. Take what your family and UD have given you out into the world and use it in your work! Thank you to all of my classmates for granting me the privilege to speak here today. I pray with all of you that God will continue to bless UD. Good luck in your future endeavors! Thank you.